



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

Governor Kristi Noem, in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, has proclaimed May as “National Military Appreciation Month,” a time for all to honor, remember, recognize, and appreciate those who have served in the past and those now serving, as well as their families.

“The vigilance of the members of the Armed Forces has been instrumental to the preservation of freedom, security, and prosperity enjoyed by the people of this great nation,” Governor Noem said in her proclamation. “Our Armed Forces depend on the dedicated service of its members and their families.”

National Military Appreciation Month includes Loyalty Day on May 1st, Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 6th, Victory in Europe Day on May 8th, Armed Forces Day on May 21st, and Memorial Day on May 30th. May is also Gold Star Awareness Month and provides us the opportunity to pay tribute to the families of our fallen heroes.

“The month of May provides an opportunity to appreciate those who serve and have served,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “These men and women continue to play a major role in the development of our country documented through a history of uncompromising honor, dedication to duty, and genuine love of country.”

For generations, brave Americans have stepped forward and answered our country's call to serve in our Armed Forces. With honor and distinction, our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen fight to defend the principles upon which our country was founded. Behind these courageous Americans stand spouses, children, and parents who give up precious time with their loved ones, bearing the burden of long deployments and difficult moves, and oftentimes putting their careers on hold. During National Military Appreciation Month, we salute the families of those who proudly are a part of our Nation's unbroken chain of patriots for their unwavering devotion, and we renew our sacred vow to uphold our promise to our troops, our veterans, and their families.

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VA ENCOURAGES VOLUNTEERS TO CARRY THE LOAD FOR AN AMERICAN HERO

Beginning April 28, volunteers organized by Carry The Load, in collaboration with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration will visit 50 national cemeteries during a 20,000-mile march along five separate routes covering 48 states — converging on Memorial Day weekend for final rally in Dallas, Texas.

The VA and non-profit Carry The Load join forces for what is called "Memorial May" during the month leading up to Memorial Day to honor veterans and servicemembers interred in national cemeteries across the country.

"This is the fifth year the National Cemetery Administration has worked with Carry The Load," said VA Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Matt Quinn. "Throughout this 32-day Memorial May campaign, marchers frequently carry signs, banners and flags honoring a fallen servicemember, veteran or first responder." Those wishing to participate in a march are asked to [register in advance](#). No donation is required to participate.

The list of national cemeteries, along with the dates and times that they will be visited by Carry The Load marchers, can be found [here](#). Carry the Load trek will be at the Black Hills National Cemetery Wednesday, May 18, at 2:30 pm

For those unable to attend, NCA will share video and photographs of the cemetery visits on NCA's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.

Carry The Load is a non-profit providing active ways to connect Americans to the sacrifices of our nation's military, Veterans, first responders and their families.

For more information about VA's participation with Carry The Load, contact your local national cemetery or NCA Chief of Public affairs Les' Melnyk at Les.Melnyk@VA.gov.

VA ESTABLISHES PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE CONNECTION FOR RARE RESPIRATORY CANCERS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is adding nine rare respiratory cancers to the list of presumed service-connected disabilities due to military environmental exposures to fine particulate matter.

The following list of rare respiratory cancers will be added to VA's regulations through an Interim Final Rule published in the Federal Register on April 26, 2022:

- Squamous cell carcinoma of the larynx.
- Squamous cell carcinoma of the trachea.
- Adenocarcinoma of the trachea.
- Salivary gland-type tumors of the trachea.
- Adenosquamous carcinoma of the lung.
- Large cell carcinoma of the lung.
- Salivary gland-type tumors of the lung.
- Sarcomatoid carcinoma of the lung.
- Typical and atypical carcinoid of the lung.

The VA determined through a focused review of scientific and medical evidence there is biological plausibility between airborne hazards and carcinogenesis of the respiratory tract — and the unique circumstances of these rare cancers warrant a presumption of service connection.

The rarity and severity of these illnesses and the reality these conditions present, is a situation where it may not be possible to develop additional evidence, prompted the VA to take this action.

The VA will begin processing disability compensation claims for veterans who served any amount of time in the [Southwest Asia theater of operations](#) beginning Aug. 2, 1990, to the present, or Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, or Djibouti beginning Sept. 19, 2001, to the present.

Any veteran who has or had one of the listed cancers at any time during or after separation from military service may be eligible for disability compensation benefits. The VA will contact impacted veterans and survivors to inform them about their eligibility and will provide information on how to apply.

Veterans, survivors, or dependents who had claims previously denied for any of these respiratory cancers are encouraged to file a [supplemental claim](#) for benefits.

PRESIDENT BIDEN ANNOUNCES APPOINTMENTS TO AIR FORCE AND MILITARY ACADEMY BOARDS

President Biden recently appointed Susan Christine Irons as a Member, Board of Visitors to the U.S. Military Academy.

Susan graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1989 and was commissioned in the Army as a Signal Corps officer. Shortly after commissioning, she deployed to Saudi Arabia and Iraq in support of Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Susan has continued her service to others and works as a County Veterans Service Officer in Lincoln County and as a board member on the South Dakota Board of Military Affairs.

Additionally, she has served as an advisor for the West Point Association of Graduates Advisory Council for four years. Three of Susan's five children are carrying on the Army tradition with a daughter graduating from West Point in 2020 and two that are also currently serving on active duty as enlisted soldiers.



SD NATIONAL GUARD NAMES LIEUTENANT OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota National Guard selected 1st Lt. Klye Heyn, of Wentworth, as its Lieutenant of the Year and recipient of the Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award.

Heyn, who serves as the executive officer for the 200th Engineer Company in Pierre, received the award as the most exceptional lieutenant after competing against officers from several of the SDNG's major commands.

The Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award was established in 1968 to annually recognize the most outstanding lieutenant in the SDNG based on the exceptional qualities of leadership, values and performance.

"I was humbled to be selected and it is a great honor to receive this award," said Heyn, a native of Chester. "I had the opportunity to serve along side other great officers for this award and it's inspiring to see what the state has to offer for leadership."

"There are few lieutenants under the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade that can match 1st Lt. Heyn's dedication to duty coupled with his leadership qualities," said Col. Phillip Stiles, 196th MEB commander.

"His loyalty to the South Dakota National Guard, leadership, and dedication have earned him the distinguished honor of being recognized as the SDNG's most outstanding Lieutenant of the Year."

Heyn enlisted in the South Dakota Army National Guard in 2014 as a food service specialist. He received a commission as a second lieutenant in 2017 from the ROTC program at South Dakota State University.

Heyn's outstanding service over the past year includes volunteering for two state active duty missions in addition to his assigned unit duties. He served as the liaison officer for the 2021 Capitol Security Force in Pierre, where he earned his South Dakota Emergency Operations Ribbon. Heyn also volunteered to serve on Task Force 153 to support the Texas National Guard's Task Force Salerno for Operation Lone Star for 70 days, where he served as the office in charge of 46 soldiers assisting U.S. Customs and Border Patrol.

"The meaning of service in the National Guard is being able to support our communities, state and nation," Heyn said. "It meant a lot to me to serve on the Texas deployment, which has been a highlight of my time in the National Guard thus far, and I hope I get the opportunity to do more."

Other officers representing their major command for this year's award competition were 2nd Lt. Hillary Smith from the 109th Regional Support Group, and 1st Lt. David Wiederich from the 114th Fighter Wing.



SD ARMY NATIONAL GUARD NAMES WARRANT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota Army National Guard selected Chief Warrant Officer 4 Kaylan Harrington as its Warrant Officer of the Year and recipient of the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O'Connor Award.

Harrington, who serves as the senior trainer for Company B, 1-196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) in Sturgis, received the award as the most exceptional warrant officer after competing against warrant officers from several of the SDARNG's major commands.

The CW4 Michael F. O'Connor Award was established in 2000 to recognize the most outstanding SDARNG Warrant Officer of the past year. Criterion for the award is based on exceptional qualities of technical knowledge, leadership, dedication and initiative.

"CW4 Harrington's impact to the SDARNG in the past year has been significant," said Col. Deb Bartunek, commander of the 196th Regiment. "She facilitated the Warrant Officer Candidate School Open House at Fort Meade in May of 2021, leading to one the bigger classes in recent history. She went on to serve as the primary trainer for the current WOC class of ten candidates ensuring the SDARNG warrant officer pipeline is full of well-trained candidates for future positions."

Bartunek added that Harrington's years of operational assignments, to include five tours to Southwest Asia within military intelligence and the special operations community, make her an outstanding trainer and coach to warrant officer candidates. "She is an extremely valuable asset to not only the regiment, but the entire SDARNG," Bartunek said.

In her civilian career, Harrington works as an emergency nurse technician for Monument Health in Rapid City. Her skills as an emergency health nurse come in valuable as a volunteer member of the Pennington County Search and Rescue Team. Harrington has continued her education in the medical field this past year as a full-time student at South Dakota State University pursuing a dual Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Biology.

Other warrant officers representing their major command for this year's award were CW4 Patrick Hiles with the 109th Regional Support Group, WO1 Joseph Dressler with Joint Force Headquarters and CW2 Marty Nygren with the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.



DAV UPDATE

The Disabled American Veterans held their 80th Department of South Dakota Convention in Rapid City April 8-10, 2022.

Officers elected to lead the DAV for 2022-2023 are as follows:

Commander—Dan Francis, DAV Sioux Falls Chapter No. 1
Sr. Vice Commander—Christine Speirs, DAV Rapid City Chapter No. 3
1st Jr. Vice Commander—Mark Wolf, DAV Aberdeen Chapter No. 13
2nd Jr. Vice Commander—Tim Walsh, DAV Sioux Falls Chapter No. 1
Treasurer—Gene A. Murphy, DAV Sioux Falls Chapter No. 1
Judge Advocate/Inspector—Robert Hill, DAV Brookings Chapter No. 22
Adjutant—Marty Pennock, DAV Sioux Falls Chapter No. 1
Chaplain—Gaylord Helmbrecht, DAV Sioux Falls Chapter No. 1
Historian—Christine Speirs, DAV Rapid City Chapter No. 3



Special guests were DAV National Sr. Vice Commander Joe Parsetich; DAV National Voluntary Service Director John Kleindienst; and DAV Auxiliary National 4th Jr. Vice Commander Terry Grabowski.

Delegates at the convention contributed \$1,600.00 for the Department Service Foundation Program, \$1,700.00 for the Bulletin Booster, \$10,500.00 for the DAV Hospital Transportation Network and \$800.00 for the DAV Service and Legislation Program.

During the business meeting delegates were briefed on finances, membership, legislation, publicity, awards, hospital transportation network, veterans employment, voluntary services, local veterans assistance program, SDDVA, State Veterans Home, State and State Veterans Cemetery; and the delegates approved 58 resolutions

The Department conducted a Veterans Town Hall and fielded questions on VA Health Care, VA Budget FY 2023-2024, VA Benefits, female veterans program, caregiver support and services, VA Mission Act, employment, reform of VA Health Care, and PTSD & TBI for our veterans.

Awards presented at the Commander's Award Luncheon were as follows:

Employee of the Year: Jesse Blankenship
National Commander's Award Program (VHA): Dina Hohn
Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year: Kim Hubers
Outstanding Support Business for 2021-2022: Cabela's and Rapid City Police Department
South Dakota VA Medical Employee of the Year: Dr. Angela Curry and Stacie Jacobsen
Veteran Related Services Non-Profit: Calm Waters/Krystal Lohff
Outstanding DAV Membership Recruiter: Mark W. Wolf
Outstanding Volunteer Driver for the DAV: Tom Schmitt
Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year: Edward A. Simpson and Ron E. Lindner
Outstanding Representative and Senate Staffer: Jesse Ewing.

NATIONAL AMERICAN LEGION COMMANDER VISITS SD

The American Legion National Commander Paul Dillard traveled across South Dakota this week visiting American Legion Posts and partners within the veteran network.

Commander Dillard and his team of American Legion dignitaries visited the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery on Tuesday morning. Director Brown provided a tour of the cemetery and briefed him on the status of the cemetery. Dillard was afforded the opportunity to see the SDDVA crew in action as they were setting headstones.

SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock met with Commander Dillard on his trek through Pierre and briefed him on issues impacting veterans in South Dakota.



Special thanks to South Dakota American Legion Adjutant Kevin Hempel for including SDDVA in this great tour and allowing us to showcase the new South Dakota Veterans Cemetery.



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 1—Loyalty Day
 May 6—Military Spouse Appreciation Day
 May 8—Victory in Europe Day
 May 8—Mother's Day
 May 10—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room in the Care Building in Rapid City—
 (321 Kansas City Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
 May 11—SDDVA Mini Conference—American Legion Post 8 Cabin in Pierre—(520 S. Pierre Street)—10:00 am—2:00
 pm (CT)
 May 12—SDDVA Mini Conference—Brookings City Library—Cooper Room—(513 3rd Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm
 (CT)
 May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9
 May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—
 Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)
 May 14-15—Ellsworth AFB Air Show
 May 21—Armed Forces Day
 May 30—Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery—(25965 477th Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
 May 30—Memorial Day Program—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home —(2500 Minnekahta Avenue)—Hot
 Springs—10:00 am (MT)
 May 30—State Offices Closed
 Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10
 Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—
 Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)
 Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—4-H Fairgrounds—(3200 W Havens Avenue)—Mitchell
 Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride—SD Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls
 Jun 14—Flag Day
 Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown
 Jun 18—Midwest Honor Flight 3rd Reunion—Sioux Falls Convention Center—11:00 am (CT)
 Jun 19—Father's Day
 Jun 25—Lake County Abate Poker Run for Midwest Honor Flight
 Jun 29-Jul 4—Parkston's Celebration of Freedom—City Park—Parkston
 Jul 4—Independence Day
 Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
 Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls



UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
Aug 18-23—USS Iowa Veterans Association Reunion—Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Rapid City
Aug 22—The Barrel House Day of Giving fundraiser for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair
Sep 5—Labor Day
Sep 10—Heroes Helping with Horsepower Military Appreciation Event—W. Main Street—Ethan—Festivities begin at 8:00 am (CT)
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Oct 10—Native American Day
Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Fifth Annual Hangar Dance—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)
Nov 5—We've Got Your Six Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
Nov 11—Veterans Day
Nov 24—Thanksgiving Day
Dec 6—Governor's Budget Address
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 25—Christmas
Jan 10—Governor's State of the State Address

UPCOMING EVENTS

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